

Serbia: The most protected zones without locations for HPPs

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South East Europe countries want to use hydro potential in construction of HPPs as much as possible in period of renewable energy sources. This causes a concern in some countries like Romania, for example, because of influence on the environment. Construction of small HPPs in Serbia is improving at the moment, despite some of 317 locations for HPPs are placed in nature parks or protected zones, where construction is not allowed- Ministry of Resources stresses. Investors are also asked to achieve criterions that refer to environment. Cadastre of HPPs in Serbia is, unfortunately, too old and it needs to be replaced and local population is not participating in decisions for these objects' constructions enough.

Construction in Serbia is not allowed on locations in the first protected zone, and it is allowed in the second and third zone. Furthermore, environmental influence studies' need to be done for some locations, according to the rules.

Dusan Mijovic from Environmental Protection Department stated that construction of small HPPs, 5 MW strong, is possible.

Some of 317 locations for HPPs are placed in nature parks or protected zones, but neither of them in the first zone where construction is forbidden- EurAktiv said to the Ministry.

Ministry mentions three locations as examples where environmental study does not suppose to be done because they are not in the first zone and they don't endanger environment and these locations are placed in Tresnjica's basin and in Bajina Basta municipality.

Licenses for locations in parks, which is being issued by Ministry of Construction and Urbanism and there were only free locations that didn't have issued energy permissions and approvals and whose issuance of local, construction and usage permission, are duty of responsible local government.

Environment as a criterion

Strategic estimation of influences on environment is being done for needs of a call which was published in February for example, but one of seven criterions that potential investor needs to achieve is influence of object to the environment i.e. as it had been formulated to local government- Ministry of Energy representative explained.

Investors were invited to describe all positive influences and good benefits for surrounding from planned investment but they would also need to achieve other legally prescribed procedures and obligations in environment sphere- Ministry emphasized.

Analysis of all possible environmental effects needs to be done as procedure of energy license issuance and if authority determines it is required for issuance of construction license that are 1 to 50 MW strong it will be necessary to do a study of facility environmental influence estimation study.

Study creation is not necessary for facilities that are below 1 MW strong, except for facilities that are being constructed in protected natural surrounding and in other areas for special purposes.

"We will also be careful about biological minimum which every investor needs to leave in river basin which is not controlled at the moment", it is stated in the written answer that Ministry delivered to EurAktiv.

Some small HPPs haven't respect the legal biological minimum sometimes, so watercourses are being silenced and river flora and fauna are being destroyed.

Dusan Mijovic from Environmental Protection Department said that Department gives all conditions for environmental protection and measures for investment performance on the submitted request.

He stated that there are various limitations for construction of HPPs that predict that water cannot be taken by machine construction and not to be returned in watercourse and pipes need to be masked or use existing channels that remained from former mills.

According to his words, small HPPs are not constructed in areas with fish spawning sites.

Problem of an old cadastre

Mijovic reminded that only study that refers to small HPPs is cadastre from 1987 that contains data like placement, planned strength, geological contain or terrain limitations.

He estimated that it is necessary to innovate cadastre i.e. to make a new one after so many years considering that "knowledge level" and circumstances have changed within almost 30 years.

He stressed that cadastres refer to potential locations i.e. it doesn't mean that small HPPs will be constructed there.

"Potential location is not obligatory location", he said and added that fish spawning sites can be determined to be placed at some sites so object would not be able to be constructed.

Bad citizens' participation

Party "Zeleni Srbije" thinks that not enough attention is paid on environment protection aspect when it comes to small HPPs construction and local population attitude is not considered.

Director of Serbian Greens party and Advisor of this party, Goran Mitic said that energy production from renewable sources is important but also that this kind of energy cannot be always considered as "green" especially when there are rules of planning, environment and energy. He added that some lacks related to damage of request for environment and its biological diversity occur always.

Mitic estimated that existing mechanism of study creation is not enough and that these studies are being done for bigger objects and that necessity estimation precedes them.

He underlined that we are forgetting that citizens also need to be consulted because construction of small HPPs can influence their economy activities and surroundings. "This is the weakest link in the whole mechanism of decision about planning and construction of small HPPs. We are not against construction of small HPPs but we are indicating this fact because it is the weakest link- population needs to be protected", he said.

Mitic added that "some form of immediate democracy can be used for plan creation" and that "possibility of consulting and public discussions needs to remain, even some sorts of local obligatory referendums".

He said that mechanism of "green chairs" in local parliaments have possibility to support ecological attitudes is not set well i.e. there is mechanism in some parliaments and there isn't in other parliaments.

"This mechanism constructed on the base of Aarhus Convention is not finished here. This is right for information, decision and right for help when requests are carried out", he said.

Mitic also said that citizens have carried out many requests and complains over their associations, but their ecological arguments are not legally supported so they are easily put away by those who are working on influence estimation study and who give the final approval".

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